Christmas traditions: special meanings for every family

By FRANCES PAULETTE

Christmas will soon be here, a season of two moods, holy day and holiday. With these moods there is worship and there is much festivity. In both we find many traditions and in both we find music.

We have all been a part of the tradition of Christmas caroling at the holiday season. Let's look at some of the other traditions of Christmas.

Many Many years ago in a county in North Carolina, there was a Watch Night Service held in a meeting house. This service began after an early supper and ceased only when the Christmas star was well up in the sky on Christmas morning.

At home everything, all the chores were left at a stand still because families wanted to be with their children at midnight at the Watch Night Service on Christmas Eve. Singing was solemn, still midnight when the awaited crowing of the rooster proclaimed the holy hour. It was a belief that the roosters only crowed at midnight on Christmas Eve. At this signal the mood changed, the tempo of the music increased and was often accompanied by the clapping of hands and a kind of shffling dance called "Shouting". It got the name from the song called a 'shout'. Short, almost shouted lines and short shouted refrains. Specific rules, such as the ban on the crossing of feet, distinguished the holy dance from the sinful or everyday dancing. A watchman was often appointed to see that the feet obeyed!

In one community long ago, on Christmas morning, songs called "gift songs" or "Vision songs" awakened the community members at an hour earlier than usual. A march was sung as they filed into the meeting house and after the simple telling of the Christmas story, many other songs mingled with the elaborate ritual attending the bestowing of "spiritual presents."

In still another community, possible members of the Quaker Sect, "sweeping songs" were sung to the rhythm of sweeping and brushing of the meeting rooms with brooms received from the spirits.

From way out west we hear the story of the serenaders of by-gone days. They were usually boys or men going from house to house on Christmas eve or during the 12-day season, sometimes marching around and around each house two or three times. They would ring cowbells, pound on pans and shouted until finallya door was opened and inside there was all they had hoped for....warmth and refreshment of apples, cakes, nuts, cider and prehaps more singing.

The first real Christmas cards appear to have been printed in London in 1846. Almost one thousand copes were printed and that was considered quite a large sale. It was not until about 1860 that the custom of using cards to convey Christmas greetings became popular. Now they are produced by the millions.

There is an old saying that if you quarrel or are cross on Christmas Day that things will go wrong for you the whole coming year.

An age old Christmas Eve tradition once believed in by many and repeated annually, is to take a perfect specimen of an onion and cut it into halves. Peel off twelve layers, one for each month of the year to come, fill each with salt. On the following morning the peelings which contain damp salt indicate rainy months while the peelings with dry salt sill be fair months.

Some say that the poinsettia has no Christmas tradition but the story has been told so many times of a little Mexican girl on her way to church with no gift for the Christ child; she was hurt and wondering what she could possibly find to take.

Suddenly her eyes saw the beautiful red poinsettias and she decided it was better to take the red flower than to go empty-handed. The story would have us believe that from that day on the poinsettia was associated with Christmas.

According to an ancient belief, holly berries possess and give wonderful power when worn in the shape of a wreath. It was thought that if the wearer went alone at midnight at Christmas and sat in a church in the dark, second sight would come to him and into the church would file those of his friends who were to die during the coming year. In some part of England, it was at one time believed that unless every bit of holly is removed from the house by Twelfth-Night, some ill luck will happen.

Traditions and customs go on and on. What about the traditions and customs in your own family? Whatever they are, why not add another.Wouldn't it be good if each of us would make a sincere effort to find someone (outside of our usual circle of friends) and see to it that their Christmas is a bit merrier. Someone, to whom we wouldn't ordinarily give a gift or special attention at the holiday season. Maybe you already have this as part of your Christmas. If you do, God Bless You!!

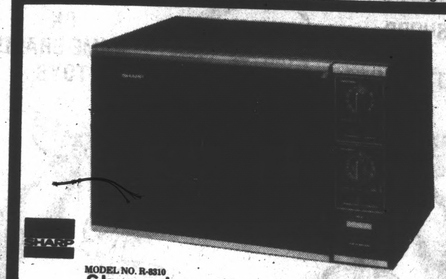
Holiday punch with a 'Golden Glimmer'

Golden Punch

1 large frozen orange juice – 8 ounces.
1 small frozen lemonade.
1 large can pineapple juice.
½ gallon hot water -- heat to boiling.
4 cups sugar.
4 quarts ginger ale.

Dissolve sugar in hot water. Mix in orange juice, lemonade and pineapple juice. Freeze. Partially thaw and add ginger ale. Serves 50.

Many thanks to Gwen Franklin for sharing this delicious and refreshing punch with us.



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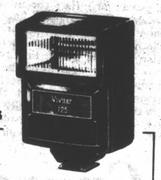

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Make your own Christmas tree

Christmas without a Christmas tree is like the spring without flowers.

Here is an easy-to-follow formula for the original "Merrymaker Christmas Tree." The materials you will need include five yards of green linen or navy cord; six inches of grown waxed linen or navy cord; and three small red beads.

Directions

1. Cut 10 cords 18 inches long.
2. Double over one cord and tie an overhand knot at the doubled end, leaving a loop by which to hang the tree.
3. Place a bead under the overhand knot. (If the bead slips over the overhand knot, make a double overhand knot.)
4. Pin the loop to a macrame board and add on an 18-inch piece with a square knot.
5. Separate the cords into two groups of two cords and add on one cord to each group with a square knot. (The square knots that face the left of the tree are tied so that the nubbins face left; the square knots that face the right are tied so that the nubbins face right. This is done by reversing the two steps of the square knot on one side.)
6. Alternate the cords and tie one square knot with the center four cords.
7. Add on one cord to the two cords on the left with a square knot; repeat on right side.
8. Alternate cords and tie two square knots.
9. Alternate cords and tie three square knots.
10. Alternate cords and tie two square knots.
11. Add on one cord to the two cords on the left, with a square knot; repeat on right side.
12. Alternate cords and tie three square knots.
13. Alternate cords and tie four square knots.
14. Alternate cords and tie three square knots.
15. Repeat Step 11.
16. Alternate cords and tie four square knots.
17. Place a red bead on the two outside cords on the left, another on the two outside cords on the right.
18. Using the two cords through the bead on the left together as a holding cord, clove-hitch the next eight cords onto it. Repeat this on the right side.
19. The four holding cords are now in the center of the tree. Wrap the holding cords with a six-inch length of brown waxed linen, forming the trunk of the tree.
20. Reinforce the clove hitches on the back of the tree with clean drying glue.
21. When the glud has dried, cut the cords about 1/4 inch below clove hitches.

This tree is small because we used a small cord. The tree can be made larger, simply by using larger cord and increasing yardage accordingly.

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